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Testimony in favor of SB 1035 and HB 6425

Our son, Ralph, was brutally stabbed to death while being robbed in his condominium in Washington, D.C. thirteen years ago.

The perpetrator or perpetrators were never found, but we have been able to dedicate our life to the wonderful memories of our son rather than dwelling on the horrendous crime. This transition would have been much more difficult if we were entrenched in a capital case or waiting for an execution to take place. Ralph was a peace loving young man who had served for three years in the Peace Corps, and at the time of his death was the Director of Training for the Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), a large non-profit agency which for thirty-five years has worked in developing countries training women in community organization, increasing educational opportunities and promoting access to health information and services.

At the same time, Ralph was completing his dissertation for the Ph. D program in Executive Leadership in the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at the George Washington University. His was given his degree posthumously, but the dissertation on the role of women leaders in non-government organizations in Kenya had not been completed. Since the research would be valuable to CEDPA as well as to other organizations, I asked the faculty at The George Washington University if I might be allowed to complete the dissertation, and after consultation they agreed to let me. I spent the next winter listening to the tapes of Ralph's interviews with these women leaders in Kenya, then wrote the analysis and findings, and submitted the completed document to the University. I had to defend the dissertation in front of a panel of professors, and they subsequently accepted the dissertation. It was later summarized and published by CEDPA. This was an extraordinary experience for me and my family, and we have continued to remember Ralph in other constructive ways.

My husband and I and our four surviving sons are all against the death penalty. From the outset, we certainly hoped for the justice of having the murderer or murderers found and arrested, but one of our first questions to the detectives at the time was, "Does Washington, D.C. allow the death penalty?" Since we have never believed in one killing justifying another, we were relieved to learn that the death penalty is not allowed there, and our grieving family would be spared the prolonged agony of dealing with a lengthy death penalty trial and possible death sentence if there were a conviction.

As a Connecticut resident, I believe that the death penalty should be abolished in Connecticut and that life without the possibility of parole effectively removes a murderer from society. I do not believe the death penalty process helps families like mine. Our experience has been that rather than being consumed with the violence that took our son's life, we have been able to remember him in the ways that he would have wanted.